

Perfect Spaghetti Every Time

Simple Techniques for Better Pasta

Great pasta is not just about following the cooking time printed on the box. The real difference comes from properly seasoning the water, cooking the pasta until it is almost done, saving the pasta water, and finishing the noodles directly in the sauce.

The goal is to make the pasta and sauce become one—not simply spoon sauce over a pile of noodles.

Ingredients

For the Pasta

- 1 pound spaghetti
- About 4 tablespoons kosher salt, plus more as needed after tasting the water
- Water, enough to generously cook the pasta

Do not add oil, butter, or any other fat to the pasta water.

For the Sauce

- Prepared tomato sauce, as needed
Rao's tomato sauce was used in the original recipe
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Reserved pasta cooking water, as needed
- Chopped fresh parsley, to taste

For Finishing

- Freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, to taste
- Fresh basil, for finishing

Directions

1. Bring the Water to a Full Boil

Fill a large pasta pot with water and bring it to a vigorous rolling boil.

For 1 pound of spaghetti, add approximately **4 tablespoons kosher salt** to start.

Do not add oil to the water.

Oil is not necessary to keep properly cooked pasta from sticking and can interfere with the sauce adhering to the noodles.

2. Taste the Pasta Water

Before adding the spaghetti, carefully taste the seasoned water.

The water should taste pleasantly seasoned—not aggressively salty.

Add a little more kosher salt if necessary.

The important rule is simple:

Whatever your pasta water tastes like is what your pasta is going to taste like.

Do not blindly follow the old advice that pasta water should taste “as salty as the sea.”

3. Add the Spaghetti

Add the whole spaghetti directly to the vigorously boiling water.

Do not break the noodles.

As the bottom portion begins to soften, gently guide the remaining pasta into the water until it is completely submerged.

During this first stage of cooking, gently move the pasta around to keep the strands separated.

Once the spaghetti is completely submerged and cooking freely, leave it alone and allow the boiling water to do its job.

4. Watch the Color

As the pasta hydrates and cooks, its original golden-yellow color will begin changing.

The noodles will become slightly more opaque and lighter in color as they cook from the outside toward the center.

Use this visual change as one indication that the pasta is getting close to being ready.

Do not rely solely on the cooking time printed on the box.

5. Taste for Al Dente

After approximately 8 to 10 minutes, begin tasting the pasta.

You are looking for **al dente**, meaning “to the bite.”

The spaghetti should be approximately **90% cooked** at this point.

It should be tender enough to bite but still have a slight firmness in the center.

Do not cook the pasta completely in the water because it will finish cooking in the sauce.

6. Heat and Season the Tomato Sauce

While the pasta is cooking, place the tomato sauce in a large skillet or sauté pan over medium heat.

Taste the sauce.

Adjust with a small amount of kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper if needed.

7. Remove the Pasta — Save the Water

When the spaghetti is about 90% cooked, remove it from the cooking water.

Do not pour the pasta water down the drain.

That water contains salt and starch released from the pasta and will become an important part of finishing the dish.

8. Finish the Pasta in the Sauce

Transfer the drained spaghetti directly into the warm tomato sauce.

Toss the noodles together with the sauce.

Add a small amount of reserved pasta water.

The pasta water will loosen the sauce while the starch helps the sauce cling to the noodles.

Continue cooking for approximately **3 to 4 minutes**.

During this time, the spaghetti finishes cooking its final 10% directly inside the sauce.

The noodles absorb flavor while the sauce and pasta come together.

9. Add Fresh Herbs

Once the pasta is properly cooked and the sauce has coated the noodles, add chopped fresh parsley.

Toss gently to distribute the herbs throughout the pasta.

10. Plate and Finish

Transfer the spaghetti to a serving bowl.

Finish with freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Add fresh basil over the top.

Serve immediately.

Chef Brian's Aha Moments

No oil in the pasta water. Properly boiling water and giving the pasta a little attention when it first goes into the pot are enough to prevent sticking.

Taste your water. Measuring the salt gives you a starting point, but tasting tells you when the seasoning is actually right.

Don't cook pasta by the clock alone. Watch the color and, most importantly, taste it.

Pull the pasta at about 90%. The last part of the cooking should happen directly in the sauce.

Save the pasta water. The seasoned, starchy cooking water helps loosen the sauce and helps it cling naturally to the noodles.

Dress the pasta—don't drown it. The sauce should coat the spaghetti rather than sit on top of it like a separate ingredient.

Keep long pasta long. Spaghetti, linguine, and fettuccine were made long for a reason. Let them stay that way.

The Three T's

Time. Temperature. Technique.

Little changes in each one can completely change the way your pasta turns out.

Eat well, and stay healthy.

